

Homeland Security teams train at park near Picayune

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PICAYUNE — More than 100 fire and police personnel and medical responders are being trained at Walkiah Bluff Water Park near Picayune in swift-water and boat-based search and rescue tactics.

Water operations classroom training began Monday and will run through today.

Beginning Friday, emergency crews will suit up and head out to the Wilson Slough Diversion Point on the Pearl River to do some actual swift-water rescue training operations, said Danny Manley, Pearl River County Emergency Management director and exercise spokesman.

Water from Pearl River is shunted down to the West Pearl at Wilson Slough where a weir speeds it up and produces actual rapids and swift-water. It is the only swift-water available in Mississippi for such training.

“The training at Wilson Slough is intense and dangerous,” said Manley. “They actually get into the rapids. There is only one way to adequately and safely learn about a water rescue of a person trapped in flood waters and that is to actually get in there and train to do it, and that’s what they will do here.”

Homeland Security and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks sponsor the training.

“What most people don’t realize is that when an emergency responder enters a dangerous situation, he is at as much risk of dying or being injured as the person he is rescuing. That’s why these training sessions are essential, and that’s why Mississippi Homeland Security does them,” said Manley.